

Cathedral of Immaculate Conception
South Claiborn Street
Mobile, Alabama

HABS No. ALA-35 (WPA)

HABS
ALA,
49-MOBI,
36-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
DISTRICT NO. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer
Auburn, Alabama

CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
South Claiborne Street,
Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama.

ALA
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36-

Ownership:

Present Owner: Catholic Diocese.

Previous Owners: " "

Date of Erection: 1839 - 1850.

Architect: Claude Beroujon.

Builder: Catholic Diocese.

Present Condition: Excellent.

Number of Stories: Two.

Materials of Construction: Brick and masonry.

Other Existing Records:

See: HISTORIC HOMES OF OLD MOBILE
By John F. Glennon, Mobile, Ala.

Additional Data: The first Bishop of Mobile was Right Reverend Michael Portier, who was appointed in 1828. He began the erection of his beautiful Cathedral in 1839, and it was dedicated in 1850.

It stands on the site of the old Spanish burial ground used as such until the City bought what is now known as the Old Church Street cemetery in 1821.

The Catholic Church owns a five acre tract of land, a portion of four squares, all in the very heart of the city.

The Cathedral was one of Bishop Portier's dreams. He saw it started in 1839. It is said that his friend, Claude Beroujon, a French gentleman and architect, assisted in laying the foundations. Without doubt he had a hand in the plan also.

The untiring efforts of Reverend J. McGarahan are also listed in its realization. It was finished at a cost of over eighty thousand dollars and was consecrated on the eight of December, 1850.

Bishop Portier died in 1859. His body and that of the several Bishops who succeeded him are buried within the edifice.

The Right Reverend John Quinlan who saw the diocese through the period of the war and reconstruction, 1859 to 1883, built the portico addition. Bishop Quinlan was born October 19, 1826, County Cork, Ireland, came to the United States in 1844, was consecrated Bishop on December 4, 1859, and died in Mobile May 9, 1883. He added twelve churches and four schools to Portier's achievements.

The Cathedral is a mighty monument. Not only is it interesting architecturally, but it represents a mighty dream, a great outlay of contributions, and an incorporation into its plan a hundred years ago the growth of the diocese of Mobile. Just so, it has not been necessary for it to become out-grown, rather there has been a reaching to it.

Incorporated in it is the sound thinking of Bishop Portier. Its situation as well as its conceived adaption to the parish is commendable.

Additional Data: (cont'd)

The front portico with its stretch of ^{six} ~~eight~~ columns, fluted, based and capped in Roman Doric, is reached by a flanking of steps easy of ascent and capable of quick distribution of hundreds of worshippers. The pediment is severe, yet not forbidding. It has no central ornament, but relies upon mass and moulding and denticulation for decorative softening. A side vista gives a glimpse of a dome to either side of which the bell towers with their circular crownings and nicely scaled crosses arise.

The side and rear facades are architecturally treated to take the weight of the mass, too, the line of pilaster take the rhythm of the pillars of the portico and frame the many lengths of leaded glass. A charming balustrade of iron enhances the rear approach.

Framing the building are giant trees which cast a lovely shadow upon the lawn and the tapestried brick of the old building. Binding it on all sides is a delightful iron fence whose lace work is a study alone.

Within, richness is the key-note of the decorative feature. The main room is massive, but not cold and gray as typical of so many old world cathedrals. Again with the warmth of color goes an intimacy of feeling despite the vastness of the auditorium. Perhaps the splendid acoustics are partly responsible for this.

The beautiful ^{maintenance} ~~up-keep~~ is another indication of the esteem of the parishioners for their cathedral. Rows of supporting columns ~~are the same as the exterior~~. These take ~~at~~ ^{from} the severe Doric order on the exterior to the very ornate Greek Corinthian. Base relief, denticulation, paneling, delicate stenciling are other decorative features of the interior on beams, ceiling, dome walls, etc.

The high altar with its murals, elegant fret work, filigree, etc., is the center for the main aisle vista. It is ~~mainly~~ scaled ^{up} to the interior and a subject for minute study.

The chancel rail brings in Gothic detail. The nave is well spaced and flanked to either side with cushioned seats. To the rear a balcony adjusts to the height of the pipe organ reeds. Below this is the entrance composition, the beautiful doors exquisitely paneled.

Additional Data:(contd).

To either side of this entrance are alcoves with double doors. This plan lends convenient circulation for large crowds. Truly, it ~~must~~ be seen to be appreciated. The vaulted ceiling is artistic and at the same time an ~~engineering~~ feat. The ~~Mosque~~ work might be passed by quickly, and yet on second thought it represents a skill that few have mastered. Ah, artists caught the dream of Bishop Portier and shaped it into ultimate beauty.

In crypts below the alter^A lie the remains of the former bishops who dedicated their services to the Mobile Diocese. In the bell towers above the edifice are the symbols that ~~lead~~ the worshippers to service. ~~Mighty is the music that the organ peals forth, mighty the chant of the Christmas Chorus.~~ Be our faith what it may, we see in the Cathedral a glorification to Christ.

Source of Material:

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